

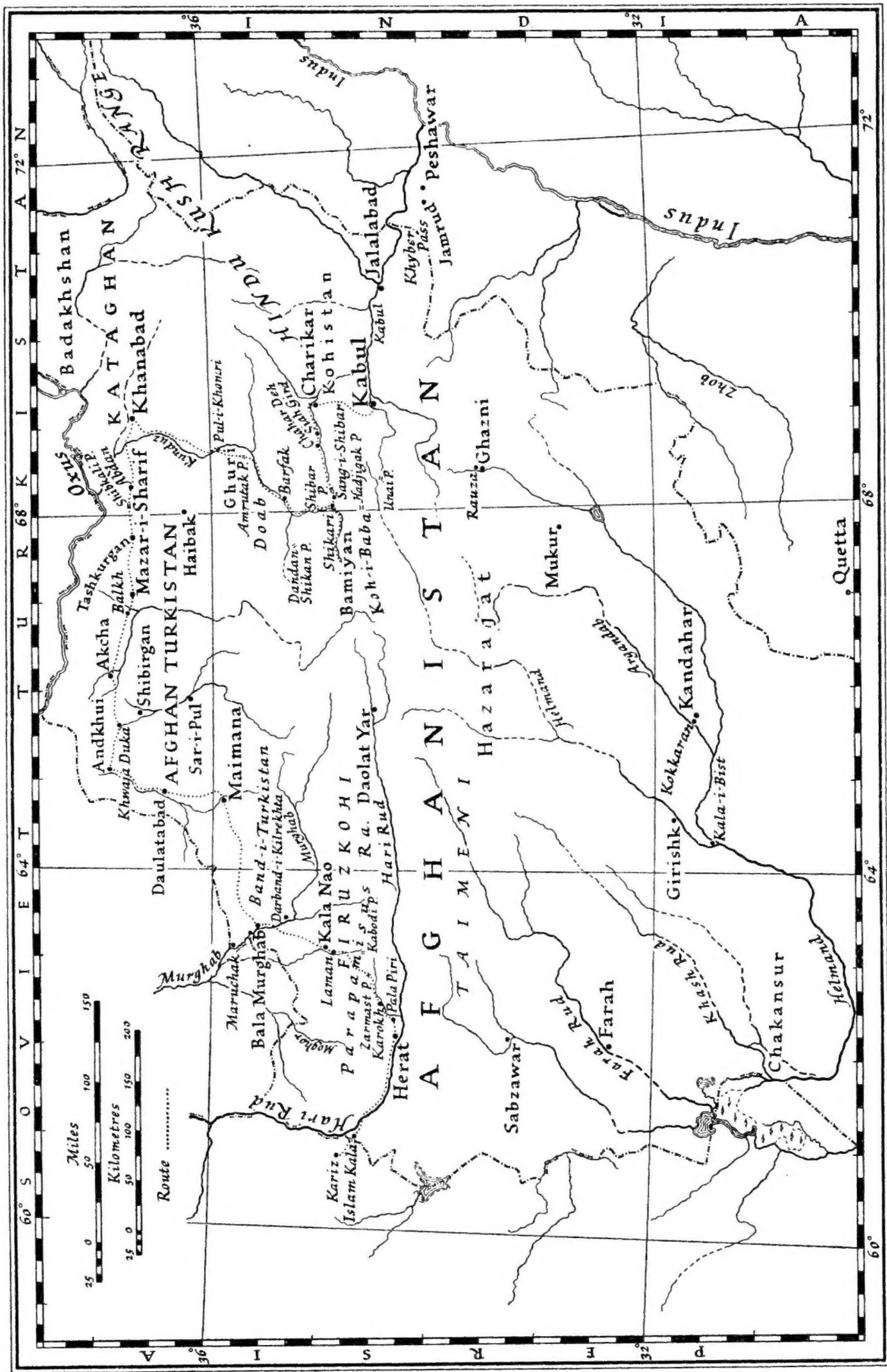
SOME NOTES ON A RECENT JOURNEY IN AFGHANISTAN

CHRISTOPHER SYKES

MY original objective was Luristan, which I hoped to visit in the autumn of last year. At no time is it easy to obtain the necessary permits from the Persian Government, who are anxious for the safety of foreigners and fear lest Luristan might give the visitor a too sensational impression of their country. But the time which I had chosen for making preliminary arrangements at Tehran was especially unfortunate. A very bad impression had been created in official circles in Tehran by the narrative which a foreign expedition published in a newspaper, particular exception being taken to the account of thrills and perils. The ultimate effect was an order from a high authority forbidding travellers to enter the Luristan and Bakhtiari provinces, and I was the first to feel the weight of this heavy penalty.

Other interests occupied me in Persia until the spring of this year, when the opportunity presented itself through the kindness of His Excellency the Ambassador of Afghanistan to Persia, Sher Ahmad Khan, to make a journey to Afghanistan and the less-known provinces of that country: Turkistan and Badakhshan. My friend Mr. Robert Byron had already attempted this journey in the winter. He is engaged on a work dealing with Islamic art in Persia and Afghanistan, and the object of his attempt was to visit Herat, Balkh, and Ghazni. He left Tehran at the beginning of November, crossed the Paropamisus, but was unable to go farther north than Kala Nao owing to heavy rains, and snow on the Turkistan pass. Nevertheless this short reconnaissance journey was, owing to his habit of acute observation, of great assistance to us on the second venture when, disappointed in my hopes of seeing the remote and great in Persia, I joined him. Much of the recording of the road was his work, of which I believe the public is to be offered a more detailed account in the form of a travel book from his pen. I offer these notes as likely to be of interest to readers of this *Journal*, not because of any valuable geographical observations made, but because these provinces are not often visited and as yet few travellers have done the journey by car, particularly by the Tashkurgan-Khanabad road.

We entered Afghanistan from Persia by the Kariz-Islam Kala road. The rains in Persia and Afghanistan this spring were abnormally heavy, and as the road connecting the two frontier stations passes through a tract of marshy country, a delay at Kariz of several days was necessary. There is however a southerly track hugging a low range of hills which is, although with difficulty, passable at any time of the year. By this we eventually crossed from one country to the other, passing through a village sometimes called Hajjiabad and sometimes Farmanabad. From Islam Kala to Herat the road is easy and well made, the 80 miles taking about four hours. The entrance to Herat from this side passes by the famous minarets (*haft minar*) and the Musalla. An interesting feature of this road is a village, about halfway between the frontier and the town, in which Turkomans have been settled, still retaining their distinctive dress.



Mr. Sykes' route in northern Afghanistan

Monsieur Hackin noted in his paper to the Society (*Geogr. J.*, vol. 83, p. 353) that owing to the improvement of communications Herat could no longer be considered an isolated town. To some extent this change has been accomplished already since the opening of the Herat–Maimana–Mazar-i-Sharif road, and is evident from the great variety of peoples in the bazaar and the goods for sale. The bazaars are now undergoing a vigorous course of renovation, and although sentimentalists will always bewail the destruction of the old, a tribute cannot reasonably be withheld from the excellence of the new designs. As is the case with most new building of this kind in the East, the old arched roof has been abandoned. Without the walls a new town is in process of erection, extending from the ark in the direction of the Northern hills.

Few things are so surprising to the traveller from the direction of Meshed to Herat as the tile work on the ruins of the Musalla and the minarets. Both the shrine of the Imam Reza and the Herat remains contain work of the time of Shah Rukh, and both are descendants of one tradition, yet there is very little resemblance in their style, design, or colour-treatment. The ribbed dome of the Musalla, similar to the Balkh dome, is the first indication of the Central Asiatic influence discernible in nearly all important architecture in this country.

From Herat we set out on the Northern road leading to Turkistan: thus traversing the same route which Monsieur Hackin discussed in his paper, but the other way round. From Herat the road follows the new Hazarajat–Kabul road until the village of Pala Piri (13 miles), when it leaves the excellent metalled surface of the new construction, turning to the north-east. Presently it enters the valley of an unnamed tributary of the Hari Rud in which by the village of Karokh (29 miles) is found the famous and delightful shrine. The garden of the shrine in which the Christian is hospitably invited to spend the night contains magnificent avenues of cypress and plane trees. It is distinguished amongst other things by two trees growing closely together, and to pass through the narrow interval between them is humorously supposed to be a sign of virtue.

From Karokh the road continues in the river valley for 39 miles. The valley is rich in pasture, and it is common to see, besides flocks and cattle, droves of mares. Near the head the road turns due north and rapidly ascends to the summit of the pass. This pass is generally identified with that which crosses the Zarmast Kotal. This identification probably arises from the lax application of names locally. For the pass most suitable for wheeled and animal traffic crosses a point indicated as the Kabodi Kotal on maps lent to me by the Survey of India, and this point is about 13 miles east and 4 miles north of that accepted by the surveyors as the Zarmast. This pass however is usually called the Sauzak, but sometimes the Zarmast. My personal opinion is that Zarmast is a general term applied to the whole of this section of the Parapamisus range. At all events it is very loosely used, but the point generally marked *Tang-i-Zarmast* or *Zarmast Kotal* on the maps is not the pass by which the negotiable road crosses. Disliking to confuse the issue further I hate to record that I have also heard the Band-i-Turkistan referred to as the Zarmast.

The crossing of the pass is dramatic. On the southern slopes the range is bare, supporting nothing more luxurious than camel thorn; on the north it is covered with a jungle of lofty juniper trees. The rainfall is considerably more

on this side, as the lush greenery, suddenly come upon, makes evident. This change of country reminds any one who knows the Firuzkuh pass of the descent from the Iran plateau into the Caspian provinces. The change here is not so absolute but more sudden.

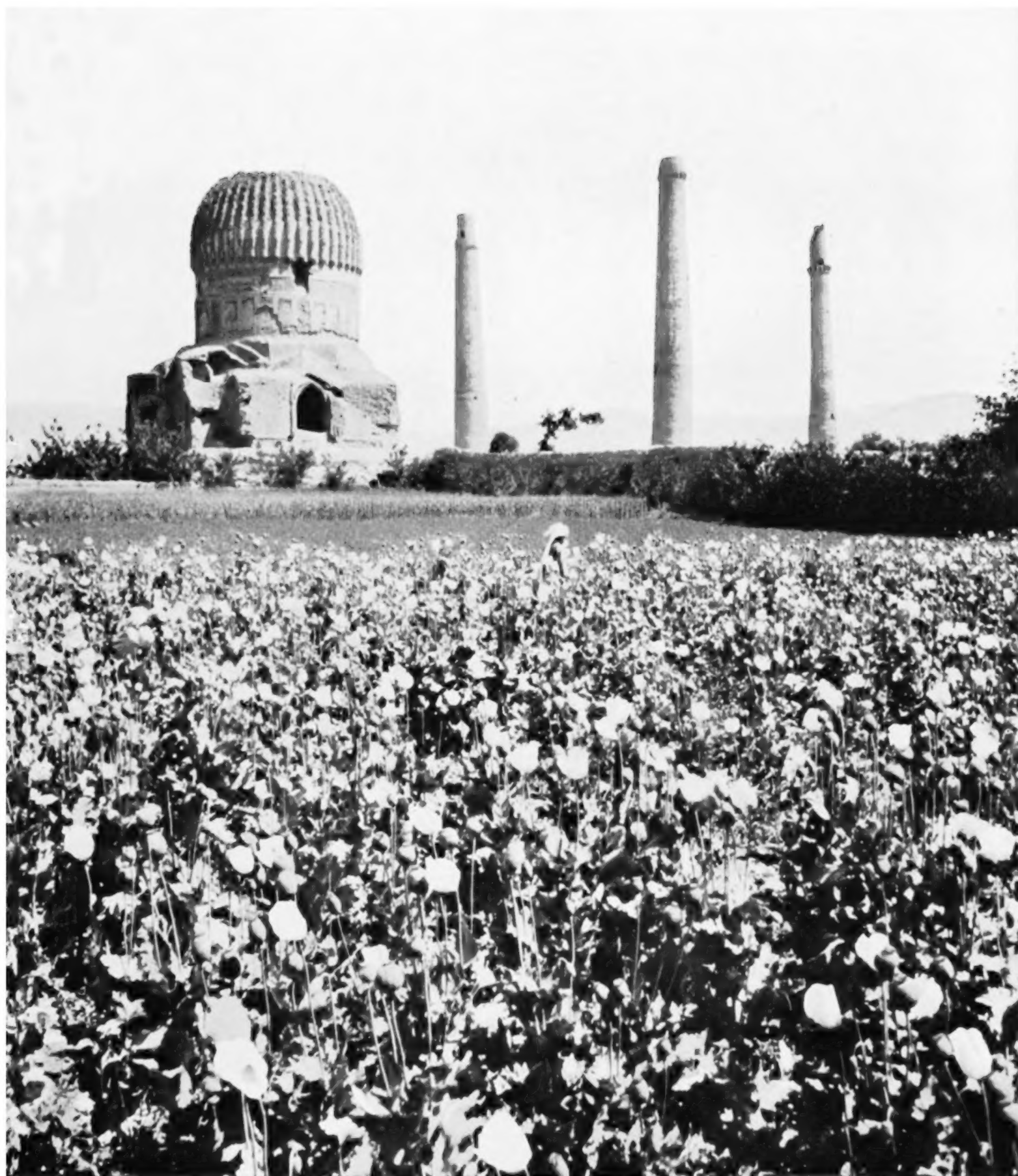
It is difficult, having only crossed in a season of abnormally heavy rainfall, to form any estimate of the road which now descends by a circuitous track from the plateau. It is certainly a piece of country in which the difficulties confronting an engineer are very great. The violent streams which a rainstorm bring raging down the precipitous gorges would cut up any but the finest structures. At the season in which we crossed it took us several hours to go not more than 15 miles. At the foot of the range is the village of Laman, a small dependency of Kala Nao, and I should like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to the Governor of the latter place, who showed us friendliness and hospitality.

Having crossed the Band-i-Turkistan on horseback I cannot say how the motor road negotiates this range. The horse route, which takes the traveller through some of the most magnificent and loneliest country imaginable, pursues an independent course until it reaches the Murghab River, 20 miles from the town of Bala Murghab, at the bridge of Darband-i-Kilrekhta. Here the river flows through a narrow gorge fortified with towers popularly attributed to Alexander.

At Bala Murghab the change from the plateau to another country is first appreciated to the full. Although Afghans are still numerous the majority of the people are Turkomans and Usbegs. Here the predominating dress of the people is of the style associated with Turkistan: long flowered gowns, generally made of chintz imported from Russia, although the Bukharan stuffs are still quite common, and in place of the Afghan sandal, leather boots. The Usbegs and Tadjiks generally wear turbans with this dress, which is in general assumed also by the majority of Turkomans settled in the country; but in Bala Murghab, perhaps on account of its proximity to Russia whence there was reported to have been a recent flow of refugees, the Turkomans wear the large sheepswool busby. In Maimana, where according to the Governor's secretary many Turkomans are settled, the busby is never seen, and, on the same authority, the Turkomans sometimes wear the low cap bordered with fur, somewhat like the cap of Vladimir, also worn in some parts of Afghanistan by the Jews.

The country between Murghab and Maimana, a distance of about 110 miles, is uniform. The conformation is very singular: a kind of wold country consisting of small earth hills looking like a collection of barrows, and covered with rich pasture; wild barley and oats in abundance. As might be expected, the sheep and cows in this country produce very rich milk. The harvest richness of this corner of Turkistan immediately recalls the Transcaspian province of North-East Persia at Astarabad and Gumbad-i-Kabus—I suppose two of the richest natural corn soils in the world.

The road from Maimana to Andkhui continues through the same type of country, the hills growing less compact and the pasture more sparse. The village of Faizabad (25 miles), famed for its excellent water, marks the beginning of a less genial country, until, before Daulatabad, the country is bleak and dismal enough to call forth a period of "Arabia Deserta." Andkhui however



The five photographs are by Robert Byron

The Musalla at Herat: Mausoleum (c. 1430 A.D.) and three of the seven minarets



Putting out cured lambskins to dry on the roof of a caravanserai at Andkhui

derives its wealth from the harsh nature of the country where it is situated. The sheep pastures, productive of the *aarab* and the renowned *karakuli* skins, are such as to make the inexpert marvel that any beast could survive on so scanty nourishment. The closely curling wool of the *karakuli* seems to derive from a nourishment containing the very minimum of moisture, and one Usbeg shepherd with whom I spoke repeatedly pointed to the bareness of the downs, as if to furnish point to praise of his pasture. The flocks are owned for the most part by Usbegs or Turkomans who display a keen though not unfriendly rivalry. A short time ago most, or at any rate a large part, of the trade was in the hands of Jewish merchants, and this especially in Andkhui. The spirit of nationalism has of late affected commerce in this part of the world, and most of the Jewish merchants have been obliged to yield the trade to Afghans. Most of the Jews have, in consequence, left this part and migrated southwards to Herat. The most important skin markets are at Andkhui, Shibirgan, Akcha, and Mazar-i-Sharif, the most important being, on the authority of the merchants, Andkhui and Akcha.

A matter of astonishment to me was the high price of skins when, on the example of buying coal at the pit head, I wished to invest in this to us exotic and handsome article. The uniform demand both from those in the trade and not precluded the suspicion of a "try-on." The cost of a good lambskin was set at 80 Afghan rupees, of a faultless one at 100 Afghan rupees (approximately £2 10s.). Very few of the skins in the Andkhui market were under the former sum. When I urged the point that at such a rate every shepherd must be a millionaire, an Usbeg herdsman calmly replied that that was exactly the case.

While on this subject I should like to mention a theory for which I tried in vain while at Andkhui to discover support. Before starting on this journey I had been assured by a European agriculturist, living in South Persia, that the most important flocks had in former times been found near Bukhara; that the fame of these flocks was known to all herdsmen, and that the best flocks in all this corner of Turkistan were tupped by Bukharan rams. He had it further, on an authority which he respected, that most of these flocks had been destroyed during the Revolution, having been killed for meat, but that many of the rams, with sufficient ewes to continue the breed, had escaped the necessary massacre, and found shelter in Afghanistan. He had asked me to find what truth there was in this theory, but in interviews with herdsmen, merchants, and Government officials, I failed to discover evidence, and the name Bukhara when associated with sheep did not seem to stir any notable recognition. My own opinion and that of the Government officials whom I questioned is that the theory is fantastic, but I submit it to the Society on the chance that a reader may be able to supply the explanation.

From Andkhui to Balkh the road continues over the flat steppe land, sometimes desolate and sometimes green where the marsh land has been either drained for pasture or reclaimed and cultivated. At a small village named Khwaja Duka (81 miles) we saw a large drove of mares with a stallion grazing on what appeared to be a fine half-grass, half-corn pasture. Turkoman encampments are common until Akcha and easily recognized by the famous aspect of the *kebitka*. On several occasions we saw parties of Turkomans travelling, and the *kebitka* with its wooden doors, roof frame, and side posts,

together with the rush walls, is carried easily on two pack animals. The rapidity with which Turkomans can strike camp and start off is world-famous, and it does not seem beside the point to record here an observation made on the only occasion when I saw an exhibition of this feat.

The occasion was in 1931 at the Turkoman horse races in Persia when H.M. the Shah attended them at Bander Shah (formerly Bander Gez) on the Caspian. At the conclusion of the races, the Shah presented prizes to the winning jockeys. The assembled tribesmen numbered, at a rough computation, about two thousand. At the presentation every one was present. Then the Shah left. Five minutes after his departure all over the plain, even, it seemed, on the horizon, could be seen horsemen galloping away. All round the course there was a kind of storm of tents being taken down. Twenty minutes later only a few *kebitkas* were standing, and those were of the resident tribesmen, and in whatever direction one looked over the tremendous expanse of steppe one saw the same galloping figures, cartloads of tribesmen, and short rapidly moving caravans. By sunset, not more than a quarter of an hour later, there was no one to be seen except the few inhabitants of the immediate country.

In dry weather the journey from Andkhui to Mazar-i-Sharif can easily be done in one day. The distance is about 179 miles, and to Balkh 161 miles. Of the greatness of the sight when the latter city is first beheld with its long lines of destroyed ramparts it is difficult to convey an impression. Perhaps Marco Polo's terse reference best performs this office: "Balc is a noble city and a great, though it was much greater in former days. But the Tartars and other nations have greatly ravaged and destroyed it. There were formerly many fine palaces and buildings of marble, and the ruins of them still remain."

The mosque (the Masjid-i-Sabz) is now the only considerable building which decay has not left unrecognizable; of the Madrassah the magnificent archway alone remains; at the western end of the town a battered ruin marks the site of the Masjid-i-Juma. The mosque has a ribbed or fluted dome similar to that of the Musalla at Herat, but the whole design of the building is of a different order, and to the uninitiated eye at least, suggests more powerfully than anything viewed hitherto the influence of Samarkand. Like so much Islamic building it suggests a devotion to façade at the expense of three dimensional proportions, but with an effect of clumsy concentration only relieved by a singular effect of the colour. Whereas in nearly all Persian tiled building the dominant blue is relieved of its steeliness by designs carried out on it in yellow, in this building the metallic quality of the blue is accentuated by whatever colour will raise it to silver; and as we saw it that evening standing out against a background of black thunder clouds, this effect was heightened to the strangest beauty. While at Balkh we met H.E. the Minister of the Interior, Muhammad Gul Khan, who was there supervising the laying out of plans for the reconstruction of main avenues. At the time of this visit the plans had not materialized in mortar and brick, but the Minister's work in Mazar-i-Sharif gives promise to the ancient city.

Balkh is separated from Mazar by 18 miles, and three roads, one direct, one *via* Baba Kohna and Deh Dadi, and one *via* Baba Kohna and Takhtapul, connect them. Mazar-i-Sharif has been greatly modernized of late: the western side is now taken up with the New Town. The most distinguished monument

is the shrine and tomb of Ali, a large blue-tiled mosque bearing three great domes surmounted by silver pinnacles. Although the mosque is a modern building the same treatment of the tiles extracting an effect of silver from the enhanced dominant blue suggests, however remotely, a connection with the Masjid-i-Sabz of Balkh. In all these towns in Turkistan it was impossible not to remark a certain *douceur de vie* most engaging. It is the custom in the evening for the inhabitants to repair to what we should term "the green," where bands, both brass and indigenous, discourse for several hours, and, at Maimana, the strength and youth of the town indulge in wrestling, gymnastics, and partridge fighting. In the latter sport, which is very popular, the cocks fight with natural weapons only.

For me one of the most interesting of surprises in Turkistan was to discover the great extent to which Persian is used as the language of everyday speech. This is all the more surprising to any one who has been in Persian Azerbaijan where, even in Tabriz, it is common to meet a man who only speaks Turki, and where half the people who speak Persian admix it strongly with Turki words and accents. Never in the bazaars of Mazar-i-Sharif did I find my own hideously ungrammatical rendering of Persian incomprehensible, nor did I ever find much difficulty in understanding. The Afghan pronunciation and use of words are full of divergence from classical standards, notably the use of *taklif* for "trouble" and such expressions as *ché gup* which would not be comprehensible in Persia, but it is interesting to note how much of the divergence is common to West Persian dialect: notably the pronunciation of *sh* as *s* and the degeneration of *f* into a vowel—Afghan often being pronounced *Awghan* and *ab* (water) becoming mysteriously familiar as *eau*. I was told that there is a movement at present to encourage the use of Pushtu in preference to Persian as the official language. One presumes that scholars would deplore this movement, and surely if the use of Persian as the universal tongue of the bazaars were to be dropped in this part of the world, there would be much cause for regret. I have it on the authority of the Vice-Consul of the U.S.S.R. in Mazar-i-Sharif that Persian is, though to a lesser extent perhaps, a common speech in the bazaars of Bukhara and even Samarqand. When it is considered that Baghdad and (presumably) Najaf and Karbala are virtually Persian-speaking towns, it is seen that a trader might pass thus from one extreme limit to the other of the Sassanid Empire and beyond, knowing only this one great language.

Those solemn clouds which had so enhanced the beauty of the Masjid-i-Sabz at Balkh were destined to play a considerable part in our future plans. A report soon found its way to Mazar-i-Sharif that the Wali of the province had been delayed at Haibak by a tremendous fall of rain involving landslides. The road, it was said, would be closed to motor traffic for some time. In the circumstances, disappointed in our hope of an excursion to the Oxus, we set about the task of hiring horses for the journey to Bamiyan and Kabul. Our arrangements were nearly completed when a lorry owner, Sayyid Jamal by name, an inhabitant of Khyber, brought the news that the journey south might be done by car: not by the Haibak road but by Kunduz and Khanabad. The opportunity, as it thus presented itself, of going farther east and seeing the province of Kataghan and possibly of Badakhshan was too good to be missed,

and it involved a remote chance of entering the Wakhan. A little regretfully we countermanded the horses and made a contract with Sayyid Jamal. Should any reader of this *Journal* ever find himself in Kabul anxious to do a journey, let me here recommend Sayyid Jamal as the most courageous driver and excellent companion whom it has been my fortune to travel with.

The road from Mazar-i-Sharif to Kunduz presents no difficulty, a great part of it being metalled. Between the town and Tashkurgan we encountered no object of especial interest except a lizard of size so vast (3 feet) as almost to make him a dragon. The town of Tashkurgan is 35 miles from Mazar-i-Sharif. According to the distances recorded on the reliable speedometer of the machine, the village of Abdan and the Shibkali Kotal should be placed about 5 miles west of the position they occupy on the maps lent to me. Fifty-five miles from Mazar-i-Sharif the road approaches the Shadian foothills, after which it enters a great plain before ascending the Band-i-Kataghan, which is first encountered at its foothills at the 84th mile. The pass which, from the Turkistan side, is no very grave matter, is 4 miles long. From the top a wonderful view comes into sight of the Kunduz plain, the dark green lines of the river marked heavily in the tawny colour of the plain, and beyond it the white heights of the Hindu Kush. The descent into Kataghan, a considerable drop, continues until a tributary of the Kunduz is reached 7 miles distant from the summit of the pass. Four miles farther on it meets the Kunduz river.

Up till the present no bridge has been built over the river, but a ferry meets the demands of lorry traffic, while horses are swum across with an expert swimmer to guide them. The rapidity of the stream is very great, and the embarking stage is about 100 yards upstream of the landing-stage although the breadth of the river is not more than fifty. Once the car or wagon is on board the ferry is left to the mercy of the river, which immediately carries it to mid-stream. Here the pilots dive into the water, and swimming with three limbs and holding a guiding rope with one hand, they bring it to harbour. The whole operation takes little time. Two miles from the river is the town of Kunduz. From here to Khanabad the road is difficult to follow. It passes through two river-beds, at the second of which it meets the Khanabad-Kabul road, having made a wide detour necessitated by the marshy lands west of the town.

Khanabad, like Kunduz, was formerly situated in a dismal tract of swamp land. An efficient system of drainage has now rendered the place healthy, as it has transformed Kunduz from an almost uninhabitable collection of hovels¹ to a productive agricultural locality. We were lodged in a delightful encampment which the hospitable Governor arranged for us in a tree garden. The trees were of the *chenar* order of plane, reminiscent of the gardens of Persia, but excelling all but the most sacred of plantations in soaring and magnificent stature. The surrounding fields grow corn and rice, and in scattered situations groups of a kind of asphodel. The latter, curiously enough, is not grown for ornament but for an excellent bread made from the crushed seeds.

The first 18 miles of the road south to Kabul is complicated by unbridged watercourses. These present no too serious impediment as they are seasonal only, and, though we travelled along this road at the most difficult time of year, we were able to outstrip the fastest horse with ease. The gravest obstacle was

¹ It is supposed that Moorcroft and Trebeck died of a fever contracted in the malarial swamps of Kunduz.



Kebitka tent at a Turkoman encampment between Andkhui and Akcha



a muddy flow, which we encountered 37 miles south of Khanabad. A storm somewhere to the south-east had been responsible, and the mysteriously rising and lowering water was never under the belly of a horse. After spending the night by the stream, in the hopes of it having subsided in the morning, we were appalled to find, in spite of a cloudless sky, that it had actually risen. The solution of the problem was simple. Although the road embankment through the stream had been washed away, the drivers of the collected lorries decided to plunge their machines in the water, drive down it about 60 feet, and turn up on to the opposite bank at a point where it rose more gently, though horribly steep enough. The manoeuvre was carried out with great dash and success. I mention this matter as illustrating the resourceful courage of drivers in this part of the country, a sovereign asset where the natural difficulties to road making might be so discouraging. Ten miles farther on the road meets the main village of the group named after the Baglan department. At the 53rd mile the road rejoins the valley of the Kunduz river, which it had previously followed for a mile, before leaving the Khanabad plain for some foothills 35 miles before. The river is followed until the road makes a short diversion of 5 miles to the east, crosses the magnificent old Pul-i-Khomri, and then returns west and south, meeting the main Mazar-Tashkurgan-Haibak road 8 miles beyond the bridge.

Three miles beyond the junction the ascent from the Ghuri plain to the Kampirak Pass begins. After winding about the foothills the road makes the latter part of the ascent on a fairly straight track which runs along a series of natural bridges or saddles. The pistachio line is passed 4 miles from the beginning of the ascent, and the summit is reached after 8 miles. At the time of the year (early June) when we crossed this pass, which might be taken as the bridge between the Iranian or Middle East and Central Asia, it may be soberly described as the most astounding landscape imaginable. The harsh crags over the snow-line, with their implication of the grimness of the plateau, dominate a scene of vast undulations covered with green grass and flowers, and distantly, lines of tree and field indicate the course of the Kunduz in the plain. On a clear day it must be possible to see almost as far as the Oxus, though the traveller would easily believe that he can see Samarqand itself in the vast scene.

On the northern side of the range the road descends moderately for 8 miles, when it enters a narrow and difficult defile, which I presume to be at the place marked "Amrutak Kotal," where it descends for 5 miles before meeting the Kunduz again. The river, which is now flowing due eastward, has changed its name to the Ghuri Rud. The road enters a valley between vast rock mountains, following the river upstream. The river is rejoined at the 100th mile, and the first considerable village is met at the 112th mile: Tala Barfak. In the spring this village is strangely desolate. It is the winter and summer habitation of herdsmen, but at the time of the spring grass and crops (the *bahari*) it is deserted except for a few ancients and a hospitable dispenser of tea.

Nineteen miles farther on the remains of the Sassanid foundation, the Castle of Barfak, stand on an eminence in the midst of a widening of the valley, and 6 miles beyond the road follows the river up into a series of gorges, which continue for a distance of approximately 48 miles. The most notable interruption in the series is the plain of Doab (149 miles from Khanabad).

The Kunduz ferry: (above) guided across the river by swimmers, (below) awaited by a crowd on the east bank

After the Kampirak pass, the long gowns of the Turkish fashion become rarer, until by Doab the people wear, almost to the exclusion of other dress, the loose draperies of Afghanistan proper. Two things are notable in this village—British petrol and glasses for tea in place of bowls. The latter is an interesting point. On the western side (that is, approaching Turkistan from Herat) the “region of the bowl” appears to begin at Kala Nao. In spite of the proximity of Russia, the bowl is preferred to the glass throughout Turkistan and Kataghan, and on this road is not ousted by glass until Doab. There probably is a faint hint of China, rather than a Persian survival, the venerable bowl having been discarded in Persia and the more Iranian part of Afghanistan. It would be interesting to know to what circumstance this marked preference is due.

From Shikari (179 miles from Khanabad) we turned off, on the new road, to Bamiyan. On rejoining the Mazar-Kabul road a day or two later, we followed the series of gorges for a few more miles until we left it for the ascent of the Shibar Pass, spending the night at an upland village (Sang-i-Shibar) where our escort entertained us to a concert of guitar and song. The elder of them declared the opinion that in India, Afghanistan, Persia, and England the music was of a high order—in other places it was bad. “But Russian singing,” I urged. “Oh, it’s rotten,” he replied (*Bessya kharab! Bessya kharab!*).

The Shibar Pass, which marks the Oxus and Indus watershed, is reached by an easy ascent 4 miles beyond this village. Two miles farther on we were again delayed by the effects of the abnormal rains this year. For 17 miles the road was frequently blocked by mud slides, which the precipitous nature of the cliffs either side of the valley render a constant danger in the spring months. The road itself is admirably designed and has a very good metal surface. Such things as these constant mudslides provide typical illustration of the difficulties in face of which such excellent work in communications has been carried through by the Kabul Government. The bazaars of the villages, Chahar Deh (226 miles), Siah Gird (233 miles), and Charikar become rapidly larger and more cosmopolitan in their wares as the road nears the capital. The plain of Charikar is entered by an iron bridge, and as the traveller leaves the main Hindu Kush ranges and enters the Koh-i-Daman regions, he finds himself in the normal plateau landscape, which is here curiously reminiscent of the Zand valley between Isfahan and the Bakhtiari mountains.

We reached Kabul at the 297th mile. We had covered 930 miles from Herat, travelling in no hurry; and under perfect conditions this journey could probably be done in eight days. For the first part of the journey we were in a Chevrolet four-seater (“machine-i-sawari” is the newly coined word for such a vehicle) which broke down completely at a caravanserai named after the Moghor district 50 miles before Murghab. The fault of this car when used on these roads was a too low clearance. From Murghab to Maimana we travelled in a Ford car. The rest of the journey was done in Chevrolet lorries, which seem the ideal cars for this country, the clearance being sufficient, and the engines giving no trouble. In all we covered 1360 miles in Afghanistan, under unusually difficult conditions, and without any really grievous excess of trouble. Of this distance only 50 miles were covered by horse, which 50 miles, with all respect to progress, were very much the most delightful.